PARENTAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOLING OF THEIR CHILDREN

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The present study was aimed at assessing attitude of parents towards the education and schooling of their children. The study analyzed the data from 145 parents, who had one or more than one school going children. Out of these, 116 parents belonged to tribal families and 29 families belonged to non-tribal families. The age range of the sample was 25-35 years, and they all belonged to Sonapur Village of Kamrup (Metro) district of Assam consisting largely of tribal population. A 23-item questionnaire was used for collecting data along with personal interview. The respondents were required to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the statements about children’s education in a four-point type scale, where 1 denotes strong disagreement and 4 denotes strong agreement. Mean scores were calculated separately for tribal and non-tribal samples, and for male and female respondents. The ‘t’ test was used to examine the significance of difference between tribal and non-tribal communities as well as across gender with regard to their attitude towards children’s schooling and education. The findings showed that the overall attitude of the respondents was moderately favourable and positive towards schooling and education of their children. The results also indicated that there was no significant difference in the attitude of tribal and non-tribal parents. Gender difference was also found to be non-significant. The difference between tribal and non-tribal respondents was evident in their future plans to provide facilities for higher studies for their children. The study suggested that, although government endeavours at universalizing education has resulted in creating mass awareness and positive response towards schooling and education, there is a lot of scope for improvement in this regard.
Future implications of the present study for policy formulation as well as for further research were pointed out.

INTRODUCTION
Positive parental attitude towards child’s education is important in determining school attendance and academic achievement of the child. Favourable attitude towards schooling and education enhances parental involvement in children’s present and future studies. Parent’s attitude towards their children’s education is affected adversely by low socio-economic status and since the tribal constitute the disadvantaged population, it is expected that the attitude of parents of tribal children will be unfavourable towards education. However, the present study aims to examine whether the tribal parents, today, exhibit a positive and favourable attitude towards their children’s education as a result of increasing awareness of values of education through Government endeavours and initiatives.

Parental attitude is a measure or an index of parental involvement. A child, brought up with affection and care in the least restrictive environment would be able to cope up better with the sighted world. Therefore, the family shapes the social integration of the child more than a formal school. Turnbull (1983, p.4) has identified four basic parental roles - parents as educational decision makers; parents as parents; parents as teachers and parents as advocates. Since the parent’s attitude is so important, it is essential that the home and school work closely together, especially for children with disabilities. The Warnock Report (1978) stresses the importance of parents being partners in the education of their children. The role of parents should actively support and enrich the educational processes. Korth (1981, p.27) states that parents should be recognised as the major teacher of their children and the professional should be considered consultants to parents. Tait (1972, p.139) opines that the parents’ psychological well-being
and the ease or difficulties with which they decipher the cues that facilitate the socialisation process influence the personal and social development of the child. It is the parents who exert the major influence on the development of the child from birth to maturity. One of the most important attributes of parental attitude is consistency. As children mature into adolescence, family involvement in their learning remains important. Family involvement practices at home and at school have been found to influence secondary school students’ academic achievement, school attendance, and graduation and college matriculation rates (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). Despite its importance, however, families’ active involvement in their children’s education declines as they progress from elementary school to middle and high school. Research suggests that schools can reverse the decline in parent involvement by developing comprehensive programs of partnership.

Family involvement is the strongest predictor of child educational outcomes. This dimension associated significantly with children’s motivation to learn, attention, task persistence, receptive vocabulary skills, and low conduct problems. Family involvement in education has been identified as a beneficial factor in young children’s learning. It is, therefore, a key component of national educational policies and early childhood programs. Much of the research on parent involvement, as it relates to children’s outcomes, has emphasized the relationship between specific parent involvement behaviors and children’s achievement. Parental involvement at school (e.g., with school activities, direct communication with teachers and administrators) is associated with greater achievement in mathematics and reading. Higher levels of parent involvement in their children’s educational experiences at home (e.g., supervision and monitoring, daily conversations about school) have been associated with children’s higher achievement scores in reading and writing, as well as higher report card grades.
Other research has shown that parental beliefs and expectations about their children’s learning are strongly related to children’s beliefs about their own competencies, as well as their achievement. Parents who evidenced high levels of school contact (volunteering in the classroom, participating in educational workshops, attending Policy Council meetings) had children who demonstrated greater social competency than children of parents with lower levels of school contact. It was hypothesized that home-based involvement would be most strongly associated with positive classroom learning outcomes and that direct school-based involvement would predict lower levels of conduct problems. Home-Based Involvement activities, such as reading to a child at home, providing a place for educational activities, and asking a child about school, evidenced the strongest relationships to later preschool classroom competencies. These activities were related to children’s approaches to learning, especially motivation and attention/persistence, and were found to relate positively to receptive vocabulary.

The attitude of the parents signifies that the supporting nature of family in their children’s education. The parental attitude can be negative or positive. The negative attitude of the parents regarding education and schooling can prevent their children from getting education. With less parental support in school work, low level of motivation and poor self-esteem of children can result Positive attitude of the parents can be beneficial to their children in many cases and can be reflected in improvement in class performance, creating interest among children to learn, and higher achievement scores in reading and writing.

The growing awareness regarding education makes many families value their children’s education and act favourably towards schooling and education of their children. They become a part of the decision making process of school, and decide their children’s
future regarding higher education. Therefore, it is imperative to assess the degree of favourableness of attitude in tribal communities so as to estimate the success of awareness programmes and endeavours with regard to “Sarva Sikhsa Abhiyan” or universal elementary education.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY:
The 21st centuries’ growth in various sectors has led our country towards achieving the distinction of one of the growing nations in the world. Various efforts have been made by the Government as well as Non Government Organizations but the literacy rate is increased if we compare it with the few decades back, but the cent percent literacy is not achieved till today. The literacy rate of the disadvantaged community is still poor.

In Assam, in spite of the various constitutional safeguards and all the different schemes by the state government, literacy level of the rural and disadvantaged mass is found to be much lower than that of the rest of the society. This may be caused by the various factors. Among these factors, socio-economic statuses, parental attitude, their interest to give education to their children, their awareness regarding education and so on play a vital role. While parents of the disadvantaged children are not highly in favour of schooling and education of their children, today’s scenario might have improved with widespread awareness regarding value of education. In this context, it is imperative to evaluate the perceptions and attitude of these parents.

The present study aims to examine whether the tribal parents, today, exhibit a positive and favourable attitude towards their children’s education as a result of increasing awareness of values of education through Government endeavours and initiatives.
Objectives of the Study:
The study broadly examines the attitude of the parents towards
education in rural households of Sonapur Village of Kamrup
(Metro) district of Assam largely consisting of tribal population.
The specific objectives are as under:
1. To examine the attitudes of parents towards schooling and
   education of their children.
2. To compare the parents belonging to tribal and non-tribal
   communities with regard to their attitude
   towards children’s schooling and education.
3. To examine whether there exists a significant gender difference
   in attitudes of parents towards
   children’s education.
4. To examine the future planning and aspirations of the parents
   with regard to their child’s education.

SAMPLE
The sample for the study consisted of residents of Sonapur Village
of Kamrup (Metro) district of Assam. The data was collected
from the 145 respondents (116 tribal and 29 non-tribal) from 185
households in this village. The total number of the male respondents
was 51 and that of female was 94. The respondents were parents
who had one or more than one school going children. They belonged
to the age range of 25-35 years.

TOOLS/MATERIALS:
The data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 23
statements, all pertaining to schooling and education of children.
Equal numbers of positive and negative statements were included
in the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to rate each of
the statements on a four-point scale (where 1 denotes strongly
disagree, 2 denotes disagree, 3 denotes agree and 4 denotes
strongly agree). These 23 statements in the questionnaire were
finalized after a thorough review of literature and all the statements reflected the value of schooling and education for a child’s future.

**Delimitations**
The major limitations of the study on parental attitude towards education are that the quality of the estimates might have affected the reliability of the data. The errors arising out of lack of cooperation of the respondents, understanding of the language, exaggeration or evasion of information etc. might have affected the result. Social desirability factor might have played a role in reporting of favourable attitude among parents. There may be wide differences between education levels of the different sub groups within the rural households because of multi religious population. This has not been taken care of. Mostly the respondents did not readily give the exact information without any assistance and this had caused a problem in the research work. Moreover, the scarcity of time and resources prevented the wider coverage of locality and sample, and the results, therefore, are not highly generalisable.

**RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**
After data collection, the ratings of respondents were scored keeping in mind the negative and positive statements in the questionnaire (Reverse scoring was done for negative statements).The following are the main findings of the study as discussed under separate headings.

**Parental Attitude towards Education**
Results indicated that the mean score of the total sample was not quite high (66.83) since the maximum score for the scale is 92 and minimum is 23. The mean score indicated that the attitude of the respondents cannot be termed as highly favourable, though it is not unfavourable either. The responses indicated that, in spite of the government’s endeavours in providing free education to all,
the attitude of the respondents was not found to be highly favourable.

However, the moderately favourable and not-so-unfavourable attitude found in the study throws light on the fact that growing awareness regarding literacy and education around the country has significantly affected all sections of the society including the tribal population. The value attached to schooling and education of children has substantially improved than earlier times when lack of literacy and education was the norm and sending children to school in a tribal community was an exception. Engagement of children in traditional occupation was considered to be more lucrative by the parents as it contributed to the family income; whereas education was considered as wastage of time and money since its outcome was uncertain and unimportant.

The reason behind the not-so-favourable attitude towards schooling among the respondents might be due to their low socio-economic status and parent’s labour market position. The respondents were mostly poor with average income per month ranging from Rs 3000/- to 4000/- and their main livelihood was based on agriculture and non-agricultural labour. They had little knowledge about facilities of the urban and developed environment. Their existing environment might have created a narrow mentality towards schooling where they fail to perceive a direct relationship between their children’s education and a better future. The second aspect is the father’s labour market position. Fathers who are in salaried employment are expected to be more aware of the importance of education and hence are more likely to invest in their children’s education than people in dependent employment since their thrust is to feed for their families rather than providing education to their children.

**Comparison of Attitude of Tribal and Non-Tribal Parents**
To compare the attitude of tribal and the non-tribal parents, mean scores of these two groups were found out separately. The ‘t’ test was employed to find out whether tribal differed significantly from non-tribal in their attitude towards schooling. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between tribal and non-tribal parent’s attitude towards schooling. This indicates that similar living conditions, uniform local facilities for daily living such as housing, water, sanitation, provision for schooling etc shared by the tribal and the non-tribal in the village may be primarily responsible for this similarity in attitude towards schooling and child’s education. In other words, the level of awareness among the villagers is similar owing to the common living conditions as well as in terms of distance and accessibility to urban area for market and other facilities.

**Gender Difference**

Results also indicated that the mean difference that the attitude of the male and female respondents regarding schooling did not differ significantly. Unlike earlier times, the females enjoy almost equal status as male in households in terms of income and decision-making. Previously, females were confined to the four walls of the house and were not aware of the value of education. Results showed that the mothers were in favour of schooling and education of their children like the fathers did.

**Parents’ Perception of Children’s Future Education and Related Issues**

The interview data (obtained with open-ended questions) indicated that the difference between tribal and non-tribal groups was found in the future planning of children’s education. Data indicated that the compared to the tribal people, the non-tribal parents were more optimistic in providing their children the scope for higher studies, i.e., education beyond schooling. They were of the opinion that higher studies would enable their children to have better
income and that schooling is not sufficient. In this study, the non-tribal were slightly better off than the tribal in terms of income, labour market position and living conditions, since they were migrants from other neighbouring states of Assam and many of them were engaged in small business and contractual jobs. The tribal parents were mostly associated with agriculture and even if they thought that education is important, the cost relating to higher education was not perceived to be affordable. Hence, a majority of the tribal parents reported that they would like to see their children earning for the family after completion of schooling rather than continue their education for higher studies. It can be inferred that while tribal were mostly concerned with making their children literate, the non-tribal were optimistic about making their children educated.

The interview data also indicated that, most of the parents, who belonged to non-tribal communities, had high expectation from school authorities regarding facilities they wanted their child should avail in school, such as adequate library, adequate furniture and equipment, and if possible, laboratories and workshops with reasonable facilities for vocational training like computer application. Provision for the girl child, they opined, to learn different types of co-curricular activities such as tailoring and painting, besides education, would go a long way in making them self-sufficient in future. The tribal parents, in comparison, were happy with the school facilities; they didn’t have the vision of an ideal school for their children.

There are several social prejudices, social customs and norms which constrain access of women to education in general and higher education in particular. The age old customs and beliefs such as i) the seclusion and veiling of women and ii) world of woman as separate from men iii) women eventually getting married and futility of investment on their education, are significant factors in the attitude of parents, especially uneducated parents, towards
the education of women. The disparate levels of socio-economic development and social stratification adversely affect the position of women. Spurious development leads to poverty and the poverty and illiteracy maps usually coincide. Poverty affects the female education, as the first thing that is dropped is the investment on females. The objectives of boys and girls education differ in society. Though education of male is looked upon as an investment for the future source of income for the family, the education of female is more an obligation and is the obligation first to be ignored in case of crisis. However, in this study, evidence was not found regarding any constraints for the girl child in attending school. Irrespective of whether the child is a boy or a girl, parents wanted their children to attend schools regularly.

CONCLUSION

There has been rapid expansion of education system in terms of enrolment, number of institutions, growth rate, etc since independence. The system has undergone a unique transformation from elitist to an egalitarian one. Therefore, all sections of the population have gained as a result of the enlargement of the system. However, the disparities between the disadvantaged groups (Gandhe, 1999) viz. minorities and non-disadvantaged groups have continued. Therefore, there is need to provide special care and opportunities to the traditional disadvantaged population in a democratic society such as ours, which stresses egalitarianism, social justice and economic development for all sections of society. It is with this in view that the Indian constitution provides an ideal of ‘Equality of opportunities’.

Efforts have been made to ensure greater access to the disadvantaged groups by making provisions for free ships, scholarships and reservation. Education Commission (Kothari Commission 1964-66), also observed and states, “One of the important social objectives of education is to equalize opportunities enabling the backward and under-privileged classes and individuals
to use education as a level for the improvement of their conditions. Every society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of talent must ensure equality of opportunity to all sections of society.”

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS
The overall favourable attitude, found in the study, among the parents in the rural community towards their children’s education is indicative of the success of Government endeavours towards Universal education. And this was evidenced across tribal and non-tribal population. Mass media and information technology revolution has helped in shaping the attitude of people across culture and socio-economic status of families. Encouraging girl child to attend school is again another positive sign. However, more improvement can be witnessed if schools could be successful in generating parental involvement as well as work upon their feedback on running applied courses and vocational training for students.

Better employment opportunities and income generation plans would go a long way in improving the financial status of the rural poor and thereby enhancing their favourable attitude and interest in planning higher studies of their children.

Future studies could compare a larger sample in both urban and rural areas to shed more light on the issue. The limitation of the present study by being confined to a single semi-urban area might have camouflaged the real state of affairs. Inclusion of other sections, i.e. students themselves and elderly can make the results more generalisable.

REFERENCES


